

American Intelligence and the Question of Hitler's Death

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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by

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Introduction

The fall of Berlin marked the end of the European theatre of the Second World War. The Red Army ravaged the city and laid much of it to waste in the early days of May 1945. A large portion of Hitler's inner circle, including the Führer himself, had been holed up in the *Führerbunker* underneath the old Reich Chancellery garden since January of 1945. Many top Nazi Party officials fled or attempted to flee the city ruins in the final moments before their destruction at the Russians' hands. When the dust settled, the German army's capitulation was complete.

There were many unanswered questions for the Allies of World War II following the Nazi surrender. Invading Russian troops, despite recovering Hitler's body, failed to disclose this fact to their Allies when the battle ended. In September of 1945, Dick White, the head of counter intelligence in the British zone of occupation, assigned a young scholar named Hugh Trevor-Roper to conduct an investigation into Hitler's last days in order to refute the idea the Russians promoted and perpetuated that the Führer had escaped.¹

Major Trevor-Roper began his investigation on September 18, 1945 and presented his conclusions to the international press on November 1, 1945. Trevor-Roper conducted enough research in only six weeks to conclusively prove that Hitler had committed suicide on April 30, 1945.² He then went on to publish his findings in a book entitled *The Last Days of Hitler*, which became an instant best seller and remains a source that historians today continue to use.

¹ Sarah K. Douglas, "The Search for Hitler: Hugh Trevor-Roper, Humphrey Searle, and the Last Days of Adolf Hitler," *The Journal of Military History* 78, no. 1 (2014): 159.

² *Ibid.*, 164.

Historian Sarah Douglas conducted research in the British National Archives to explain how Trevor-Roper attained the necessary information for his publication, and along what timeline he received this information.³ According to Douglas, the British received extensive allied help in interrogating witnesses and synthesizing information from the Americans, but conducted the majority of the investigation on their own.

Sarah Douglas's article raised questions about the degree of American involvement in the investigation into Hitler's death. It was unclear from Douglas' research in the UK whether the Americans had conducted a separate investigation of their own or simply contributed to the British investigation. Her research also raised two additional questions: if American intelligence was only peripherally involved, why this lack of interest? What were they doing in their sector?

My honors research argues that first, the United States did show some, if limited, interest in the question of Hitler's death. Second, I argue that in contrast to British intelligence, American intelligence was primarily concerned with accumulating information on: German policy in occupied countries during the war; foreign labor and its impact on the German war machine; censorship and the press's effect on the war effort; and the German standard of living during the war from captured members of the German state. These discoveries further suggest that the British and Americans shared information, but did not necessarily conduct a joint investigation.

The existing historical literature on the American intelligence postwar efforts lingers on Operation Paperclip, an initiative officially begun in August of 1945 to bring German scientists and engineers to the United States in order to research technological advances. Originally, I

³ Douglas, "The Search for Hitler," 164.

thought there might be a direct link between my findings and the origins of Operation Paperclip, but it seems that the information I found falls into a related but different category.

Operation Paperclip started out as an initiative called Operation Overcast. The goal of the program was to exploit Nazi scientists before sending them back to Europe. The three main points that the War Department stressed in July of 1945 were that “certain German specialists could be utilized to increase our war making capacity against Japan and aid our postwar military research...no known or alleged war criminals should be brought to the United States...and the purpose of the is plan should be understood to be temporary military exploitation of the minimum number of German specialists necessary.”⁴ Poor management and competition between the Americans, British, and Russians over scientists who were free to choose which country they wanted to work with made it necessary to revamp the project.⁵

An overhaul of the program in March of 1946 resulted in the birth of Operation Paperclip, as it became known throughout history. Officials named the initiative “paperclip” due to the use of paperclips to attach the participants’ new identities to the personnel files on them. Paperclip allowed the US to utilize Nazi scientists and engineers in order to prepare for the coming Cold War with Russia and prevent postwar Germany from regaining the power they held at the beginning of the war. The project included thousands of German and Austrian specialists, some of whom were implicated in trials for war crimes.⁶ According to Linda Hunt, the program continued to operate until 1973, decades after the General Accounting Office claimed it had

⁴ From the appendix of documents attached to Department of the Air Force, *History of the AAF Participation in Project Paperclip, May 1945-March 1947* (Wright Field, Ohio: Air Materiel Command, 1948), 4 vols., cited in Annie Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip: The Secret Intelligence Program to Bring Nazi Scientists to America*, (New York: Little, Brown, 2014), 176.

⁵ Wolfgang W. E. Samuel, *American Raiders: The Race to Capture the Luftwaffe's Secrets* (Jackson: U of Mississippi, 2004), 394-395.

⁶ Linda Hunt, *Secret Agenda: The United States Government, Nazi Scientists, and Project Paperclip, 1945 to 1990* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), 1.

ended in 1947.⁷ Operation Paperclip became famous due to the work of scientists like Wernher von Braun, but the importance of other information that was obtained from key scientists and experts after they were made prisoners of war cannot be understated.⁸

My work shows that the Americans began interrogating prisoners of war immediately after capitulation in order to gather information on foreign policy in the German occupied areas during the war, Germany's use of foreign labor, Nazi censorship and the press, and the standard of living in Germany during the war. The Americans apparently wanted to understand how Hitler mobilized a nation and kept their loyalty until defeat.

Interestingly, Americans did launch inquiries into Hitler's death, but only several years after Trevor-Roper announced his findings to the international press on November 1, 1945. This finding supports my conclusion that the Americans reacted to information about Hitler's death rather than acting themselves. The United States intelligence officials conducted two of the most important interrogations in the investigation into Hitler's death, but their overall work on the subject was more qualitatively than quantitatively significant, as shown by the comprehensive nature of the interrogations on the subject.

My first step toward understanding the events of the postwar period was to research the fall of Berlin and its implications for all parties involved. It was important to understand the fall of Berlin from all perspectives in order to determine the motivations of the leadership of each country and their subsequent reactions to the news of Hitler's death. Great Britain was deeply invested in the search for Hitler, possibly due to the heavy losses the country during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Russia's relationship with the other Allies was incredibly strained due to the

⁷ Hunt, *Secret Agenda*, 1.

⁸ Von Braun was a German engineer who worked on the German V-2 rocket program before coming to America and working as an expert in rocket technology and jet propulsion.

estimated 26.6 million casualties the country sustained throughout the war.⁹ According to Christian Hartmann, Stalin did not feel that the Russians were welcome in international politics and “[The USSR] was unable to do more than react to the political situation that the other powers created.”¹⁰ Tensions between Stalin and his wartime partners were thus already high by mid 1945, and he did not see a need to share all of his information with his former partners. The United States sustained far fewer losses than Great Britain and Russia due to the lack of fighting on the American home front, and Americans therefore were presumably less troubled by the lack of information surrounding Hitler's death.

My preliminary reading made it easier to understand the documents in the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and also to recognize key players immediately when their names appeared. I began researching the topic in Professor Conklin's research seminar and wrote a preliminary paper that I have expanded upon in this thesis.¹¹ Reading over Sarah Douglas's

⁹ Christian Hartman, *Operation Barbarossa: Nazi Germany's War in the East, 1941-1945*, (Munich: Oxford University Press, 2011), 157.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ Sources for initial paper: Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, Translated by Richard and Clara Winston (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 1973); Joachim Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, Translated by Margot Bettauer Dembo (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004); Joseph Goebbels, *Final Entries 1945: The Diaries of Joseph Goebbels*, Translated by Richard Barry, (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1978); Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Translated by James Murphy (Los Angeles, CA: Angriff Press, 1981); Heinrich Hoffman, *Hitler Was My Friend: The Memoirs of Hitler's Photographer*, Translated by Lt.- Col. R. H. Stevens (Bath, England: Burke Publishing Company Ltd., 1955); Anton Joachimsthaler, *The Last Days of Hitler: The Legends, The Evidence, The Truth*, Translated by Helmut Bögl, (New York, NY: Sterling Publishing Company, 1996); Traudl Junge, *Until the Final Hour: Hitler's Last Secretary*, Translated by Anthea Bell (Munich, Germany: Ullstein Heyne List GmbH and Co., 2002); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010); August Kubizek, *The Young Hitler I Knew*, Translated by E.V. Anderson (Cambridge, England: Paul Popper and Company, 1954); Heinz Linge, *With Hitler to the End: The Memoirs of Adolf Hitler's Valet*, Translated by Geoffrey Brooks (New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009); Gita Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle With Truth* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf Inc. Publishing, 1995); Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, Translated by Richard and Clara Winston (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1970); Toby Thacker, *Joseph Goebbels: Life and Death* (Basingstoke,

article multiple times helped me identify the primary players and their roles in the war, and it also helped in understanding the conditions in Germany immediately after the war. The lack of infrastructure and social order would have made locating and identifying potential witnesses incredibly difficult, but those responsible for the investigation were nevertheless able to finish their work in a very timely fashion.

The Undergraduate Research Office provides a grant called the Undergraduate Research Scholar Award that funds undergraduate research in a variety of disciplines. URO chose my project for funding, which made the investigation into American involvement possible. The relevant documents are located at the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland, requiring a trip to complete my research. I found the boxes and folders containing documents related to the research topic prior to the trip through the use of the online catalogue that NARA's website provided. A meeting with an archivist upon arriving at the archives ensured that all possibly related documents had been listed for examination.

It was necessary to spend a week going through each of the boxes and photographing documents that could be used to shape an argument. There were thousands of documents that contained key words relating to Hitler's death, but only a fraction proved useful in showing what American intelligence was interested in while Trevor-Roper and his team conducted their investigation. The boxes that held the majority of relevant documents were those that housed the Historical Interrogation Commission reports, Hitler's Jawbone Investigation reports, and FBI documents regarding Hitler's supposed escape from Germany.

England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1947); A.N. Wilson, *Hitler* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2012).

After visiting the archives, I developed a timeline of Trevor-Roper's work during his investigation as well as of the American intelligence officials' interrogations. This timeline formed the basis for the project's primary argument. It was also necessary to construct a database of relevant documents with their box number, folder, date, location, title, summary, and list of important names mentioned. This early work made reference back to specific documents much smoother and the writing process much more manageable.

The archival documents from the relevant time period indicated that American Intelligence gathered information on the way Germany conducted the war while Trevor-Roper was conducting his investigation into the last days of Hitler. The only interrogations that the Americans conducted that focused on the death of Hitler were those of Erich Kempka on September 26, 1945 and Hanna Reitsch on October 8, 1945.¹² The Americans also interrogated Erich Mansfeld, whose interrogation was not in the Historical Interrogation Committee file.¹³ Intelligence also created a complete report on Hitler's body and health at the time of his death with the help of his primary doctor, Theodor Morell, and other physicians including Erwin Giesing, Karl Brandt, and Hanskarl von Hasselbach.

Ten of the forty-three documented interrogations that occurred immediately after the war were conducted between September 18 and November 1, 1945 while Trevor-Roper was investigating the last days of Hitler. The remaining thirty-three took place before September 18, 1945. The documents that I found were reports written from the information discovered during the interrogations. There was not much information on how these interrogations were carried out

¹² Box 1366, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports 1945-1945, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

¹³ Douglas, "The Search for Hitler," 168.

or what was done with uncooperative prisoners. The majority of the reports that I read stated that the subjects were cooperative with officers and answered questions truthfully and to the best of their knowledge. However, it is impossible to know the true content of these interrogations because many were taken in German and translated while others were simply created into reports. There were many moving parts regarding the behavior of captured former Nazis and their motives would have certainly influenced their narrative and behavior.

Two out of the ten interrogations that took place between September 18th and November 1st mention Hitler's death: those of Eric Kempka and Hanna Reitsch. The remaining eight focus on different aspects of how the Germans ran the war. These topics are indicative of what was discussed during the remaining thirty-three interrogations that took place prior to September 18, 1945. Taken together, these 43 interrogations support the conclusion that the United States was immediately anticipating escalating tensions with its erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union, and already moving towards the implementation of Operation Paperclip, an American initiative begun in August of 1945 to bring Nazi scientists, engineers, and technology to the United States.

A second, related, finding in my research is that the only serious investigation that the Americans conducted regarding Hitler's death did not begin until 1947. Fox Mathews, an interrogator for the 7707th European Command, was told in 1946 that the Russians had approached Hitler's dentist, Hugo Blaschke, in 1945 to identify a jawbone as Hitler's. Further investigation revealed that it was not Dr. Blaschke, but Dr. Fedor Bruck who practiced in the same building after Dr. Blaschke left. The investigation continued for over a year and was eventually closed when it was discovered that a Bulgarian dentist named Dr. Arnaudow had identified Hitler's jawbone.

The final part of my findings was from the FBI files regarding Hitler's death. J. Edgar Hoover's bureau handled all postwar claims that Hitler was still alive. These began surfacing immediately after Hitler's death, and continued to appear decades later. Federal officers quickly discredited the citizens who called in the majority of these cases, but the claim that Hitler was hiding out in South America with other top officials persisted. There were letters that had been sent in with newspaper clippings regarding the latest news of Hitler's whereabouts as well as a report written about Trevor-Roper's book, *The Last Days of Hitler*.

My work is important to the understanding of American priorities following the fall of Berlin in 1945. Hitler's death was not a major concern for the United States interrogators in the occupied zones, and they had other priorities involving the captured German prisoners of war. My findings indicate that these interrogations began immediately after Hitler's death and were completed as quickly as possible through the end of 1945. There is no explicit link between the interrogations from the Historical Interrogation Committee file and Operation Paperclip, but the similarities between the two initiatives are undeniable. The Americans were very interested in obtaining a certain kind of information from the subjects in the Historical Interrogation Committee file, but these subjects were less valuable than the subjects involved in Operation Paperclip in the long run due to the nature of their testimony, and they could be tried for war crimes if they were thought to be guilty. The Americans only needed one-time answers from these prisoners about German foreign policy, campaign planning, and infrastructure, while gathering information from the engineers and scientists required years of cooperation. The interest in the two groups of prisoners was similar, but I think the potential for advancing wartime technology caused shortsightedness in Operation Paperclip with regard to the prosecution of those guilty of war crimes.

Chapter 1: The British Investigation

In September 1945, Dick White, head of British counterintelligence in the German occupied zone and future head of MI5 and MI6, chose Major Hugh Trevor-Roper to spearhead the investigation into Hitler's death. American and Canadian cooperation aided the operation, but the British bore the brunt of the responsibility. Their interest in the matter no doubt had roots in the destruction that the Battle of Britain caused, and the final comprehensive report definitively proved Hitler was dead. The British investigation's thorough nature allowed the Americans to hold different priorities during the immediate postwar period. They did not seem as concerned about examining Hitler's last days and took Trevor-Roper's conclusion as definitive – which in many ways it was. *The Last Days of Hitler* was an extraordinary feat of on-the-spot research, although in the end many more people contributed to its compilation than Trevor-Roper acknowledged.

The beginning of the end of Hitler's Third Reich was evident as he spent his final months holed up in the *Führerbunker* beneath the old Reich Chancellery garden. Stalin's Red Army was advancing quickly (due to the competition Stalin encouraged between his commanders, Marshal Georgi Zhukov and Marshal Ivan Konev) and destruction followed wherever they marched. The news of the approaching Russians did not seem to affect Hitler, who would not accept that Germany was dangerously close to defeat. Still, the Führer turned 56 on April 30, 1945 in the bunker, and by all accounts looked and behaved much older. The strains of managing and maintaining a nation at war with much of the world for several years manifested in Hitler's

physical being. Joachim Fest, in his account of Hitler's appearance, noted, "his facial features had become puffy, bloated. The heavy, dark pouches under his eyes became more and more noticeable. Markedly stooped, he walked with a peculiar gait, lurching from side to side."¹⁴

According to Fest's account, Hitler's body had realized what his mind still refused to accept: his life's work was coming to an end, and the world empire that he had always envisioned was no longer a possibility. He moved around the bunker like a ghost, and stopped caring for his own tidiness and personal hygiene.¹⁵ On the front lines, however, Hitler's subordinates never faltered in carrying out the Führer's orders. It seemed ludicrous to them that Hitler would not have a plan to save Berlin, and his own commanders refused to believe him when he declared that the war was lost on April 22, 1945.¹⁶

Time was running out as Stalin's forces advanced on Berlin, but Hitler refused to entertain the idea of surrender. This appeared to be more related to a feeling of resignation than with a resolve that the war could still be won. Hitler had given up on his quest and on his country, and no longer felt any responsibility toward those he had convinced to join in his war against the greater part of the world. In a final conversation with Albert Speer, the Minister of Armaments, Hitler said,

If the war is lost, the people will also be lost. There is no need to be concerned about the essentials the German people would need to survive even on the most primitive level. On the contrary, it is better to destroy these things, to destroy them ourselves. Because the [German] people have proved they are the weaker ones, and the future belongs exclusively to the stronger people in the East. Besides, after this struggle, those who are left will only be the inferior ones, for the good have fallen.¹⁷

¹⁴ Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 21.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷ Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, 440.

Fanatic devotion by some juxtaposed with a crumbling command structure in the face of overwhelming defeat characterized the fall of the Third Reich. The Nazi Party existed for less than twenty years and the body of its leader was coated in petrol and thrown in a shell crater to burn. Hitler's death threw the regime into chaos. The Führer had controlled his party by pitting those who posed a threat to him against each other. In this way he was able to maintain a stranglehold on his subordinates without their suspicion. However, this style of management meant that without the kingpin, the hierarchy would surely crumble, especially with the other pressures that the war created, as was the case in Berlin following April 30, 1945.

Hitler's suicide triggered a chain reaction amongst those in his inner circle, and many did not survive much longer than their former master. Very few people were present when Hitler committed suicide, which prompted the British investigation in order to confirm his death. Albert Speer turned himself in to the Americans and confessed his crimes at Nuremberg before serving his sentence at Spandau Prison. Western Allied forces captured Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), and Hermann Göring, former President of the Reichstag before they committed suicide via cyanide capsule in captivity.¹⁸ Martin Bormann, Head of the Nazi Party Chancellery and Hitler's personal secretary, perished at the hands of the Red Army while trying to flee the ruins of Berlin.

Contradictory orders regarding the capitulation of Berlin caused confusion among the troops still in the area and conflict between their commanders. General Helmuth Weidling received a memo from the recently deceased Führer that permitted a breakout attempt, but

¹⁸ Heinrich Himmler committed suicide via cyanide capsule on May 23, 1945, before being tried, and Hermann Göring was sentenced at the Nuremberg trials before killing himself in the same manner over one year later.

prohibited the remaining pieces of the German army from capitulating.¹⁹ The Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, interrupted Weidling's attempt to carry out the breakout by deciding to negotiate with the Russians. Goebbels was unsuccessful at negotiating surrender with General Chuikov, and Hitler's most faithful follower followed his mentor faithfully to the grave in a final showing of solidarity.²⁰ Goebbels and his wife, Magda, committed suicide in the same Reich Chancellery garden where the Russians later found Hitler and Eva Braun's remains. Before the Goebbels ended their own lives, Magda administered cyanide capsules to their six children with the help of Dr. Ludwig Stumpfegger, Hitler's personal surgeon.²¹

The fighting went on for several days before total capitulation occurred on May 7.²² A lack of communication between units throughout the city caused confusion regarding the orders to surrender. Young boys and old men made up the majority of the units left defending the city by the time that the Battle of Berlin was coming to an end. Hitler even held a ceremony during his final days to honor the Hitler youth who were responsible for destroying Russian tanks within the city walls. Various members of the party made attempts to work with the Russians, but it was not until Weidling proceeded with capitulation that the fighting began to cease.²³

The German soldiers were not the Russians' only victims in the days leading up to total capitulation. The civilian population of Berlin was subjected to a wave of looting, murder, starvation, and rape that had become typical of Soviet occupation in revenge for the equally horrific atrocities that the German soldiers had perpetrated against Russian civilians on the

¹⁹ Joachim Schultz-Naumann, *The Last Thirty Days: The War Diary of the German Armed Forces High Command from April to May 1945: The Battle for Berlin: Reflections on the Events of 1945* (Lanham, MD: Madison, 1991), 180.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

²¹ Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 143-144.

²² *Ibid.*, 167-168.

²³ Schultz-Naumann, *The Last Thirty Days*, 181.

Eastern Front during Operation Barbarossa.²⁴ Two large Berlin hospitals estimated the number of women raped between 95,00 and 130,000. Of these women, around 10,000 would die as a result, most by suicide.²⁵ This pattern continued for weeks, and was made worse by the German civilian dependence on the Red Army for food.²⁶ Cornelius Ryan remarked in his book *The Last Battle* that "Berlin had become a second Carthage -- and the final agony was still to come."²⁷

All of the Allies gathered and interrogated prisoners beginning immediately after the official end of the war in May of 1945. The Russians were equally eager to collect and interrogate witnesses, but reports of the Russian army's cruelty towards prisoners of war by led to a mass exodus towards the western Allies. This brutal treatment of POWs gave the Americans, British, and Canadians the upper hand in finding key witnesses and high-ranking members of the Nazi party for interrogations. The latter established temporary prisoner of war camps and interrogation reports began to emerge from various parts of Europe where former members of the Nazi party fled in hopes of escaping the Russians. Many Germans died while trying to flee Berlin, and still the Russians captured more during their flight to the western Allied lines.

The Allies realized after the dust settled that they were still missing the most important prisoner of all: Adolf Hitler.

With this realization came action, first by the British. The Battle of Britain had taken a great toll on the civilian population of England, and the Germans' near success in conquering their homeland made a confirmation of Hitler's death necessary. The Americans did not have the fixation on Hitler's death that the British did because of the distance that separated the American

²⁴ "Each of the dead became a number. Between them, the Nazi and Stalinist regimes murdered more than fourteen million people in the bloodlands." Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010), 380.

²⁵ Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin, 1945* (New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 2002), 410.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 414.

²⁷ Cornelius Ryan, *The Last Battle* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 1.

homeland from Germany and the lack of civilian casualties in the United States. The British had a chip on their shoulder moving forward from October of 1940, and the Allied leaders in May of 1945 would not forget the sacrifices made by British troops and civilians alike during the Battle of Britain.

The German *Luftwaffe*'s terror campaign against England was such that the British had a vested interest determining whether Hitler was truly dead. The official dates for the start and end of the Battle of Britain are July 10, 1940 and October 31, 1940, but as Richard Hough and Denis Richards point out, "the official dates...can only make any sense with the supporting argument that it had to begin and end formally at some time for the sake of the history books and battle honours for the aircrew who participated."²⁸ The assault on Britain began well before July 10, and the island's civilians were hardly given rest from attack until May of 1941.²⁹

The Germans moved into their assault on the British following a quick and decisive victory over the French army. The British and French had seen little action between their declaration of war against Germany on September 3, 1939 until mid 1940 due to their reluctance to intercede in Poland. The Germans launched their invasion of France in May of 1940 that ended with the French government's capitulation after less than two months of fighting. According to James Holland, this absolute victory seemed to point to German military superiority, but it was actually more telling of France's military shortcomings.³⁰ The French suffered during and after the First World War, and would have done anything to avoid another conflict with the Germans. The Maginot Line, a line of fortification along the French border, was

²⁸ Richard Hough and Denis Richards, *The Battle of Britain* (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Books, 2008), 121.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 304.

³⁰ James Holland, *The Battle of Britain: Five Months That Changed History; May-Oct. 1940* (Ealing: Bantam Press, 2010), 605.

created as a form of defense against invasion, but it could not withstand the German onslaught.³¹ The German momentum going into the Battle of Britain was not enough to overcome operational dysfunction within the *Luftwaffe*, and the British would be quick to exploit these weaknesses. Britain was far enough away from German airfields to create problems fueling the bombers enough to get them to and from the capital, and the Germans did not have the excellent leadership that the Royal Air Force did in Hugh Dowding.

The *Luftwaffe* conducted the Battle of Britain in distinct phases, which contained different methods and focuses for assault. The *Luftwaffe* targeted shipping lanes and then airfields in an effort to cut the British off and systematically suffocate the island. When these strategies failed to yield adequate results, the Germans began to turn their gaze inland. The resulting assault on southern airfields placed a stranglehold on British production of aircrafts and pilots capable of operating them.³² If the Germans had not switched the focus of their attacks to London, the outcome of the Battle of Britain could have changed drastically.

It can be assumed that the British were fighting for their lives during the Battle of Britain due to the recent collapse of France and the ambition of Hitler to spread his armies across the European continent. Prime Minister Winston Churchill's resilience and the skill with which Air Marshal Dowding led his RAF fighters helped Britain to turn the tide of battle and prevent a German invasion. When speaking about Dowding, Churchill remarked, "we must regard the generalship here shown as an example of genius in the art of war."³³ Churchill himself was the picture of resistance and British pride during the war, and said during October of 1940 during a

³¹ Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millett, *A War To Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 62.

³² Hough and Richards, *The Battle of Britain*, 307.

³³ Hough and Richards, *The Battle of Britain*, 184.

particularly difficult time that, “the people of Britain must stick it out.”³⁴ However, Churchill and Dowding's leadership did not win the battle. “Everyone played their part: the navy, the army, the auxiliary services, the Home Guard, the groundcrews, the Observer Corps, the civilian repair units- Britain's defiance in the summer of 1940 was a collective effort.”³⁵

Though the outcome of the Battle of Britain has been mythologized and labeled as a showing of British resilience and bravery, service member and civilian losses were still heavy. In the month of October alone, 13,000 British citizens were killed and 20,000 were seriously injured in the bombing attacks that the German *Luftwaffe* perpetrated.³⁶ When White chose Hugh Trevor-Roper, a brilliant young historian still at Oxford, to conduct an investigation into the last days of Adolf Hitler, he was answering the national call for confirmation of the Führer's death. Hitler's ghost was still haunting the European continent, and Trevor-Roper's investigation would put British minds at ease by proving that the man responsible for the near invasion of their homeland and thousands of British casualties was finally dead.³⁷

Trevor-Roper was born in 1914 to Bertie and Kathleen Trevor-Roper in Glanton, the middle child of three.³⁸ He loved to read from an early age, and joined the Belhaven Hill Preparatory School in Dunbar, Scotland before being awarded a scholarship to Charterhouse School in Surrey.³⁹ Trevor-Roper began his undergraduate career as a classical scholar in 1932 at Christ Church Oxford.⁴⁰ The future major went on to accept a position as a research scholar with Merton College, Oxford while he completed his research into the life of Archbishop William

³⁴ Ibid., 334.

³⁵ Holland, *The Battle of Britain*, 607.

³⁶ Hough and Richards, *The Battle of Britain*, 304.

³⁷ Adam Sisman, *An Honourable Englishman: The Life of Hugh Trevor-Roper* (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 2011), 133.

³⁸ Ibid., 3-4.

³⁹ Sisman, *An Honourable Englishman*, 9, 12.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.

Laud.⁴¹ His research into the Archbishop would later be published into his first work in 1940 as a biography.

Trevor-Roper began his military career in 1939 following Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia.⁴² His distrust of Hitler following the Führer's meeting with Neville Chamberlain in 1938 influenced Trevor-Roper's decision to play his part in the coming conflict with Germany.⁴³ The young undergrad was ashamed of the way Great Britain handled the German threats and did not believe that peace had truly been achieved, saying, "can we trust such a man? Is he not like Crowell, a knave self deluded by his own idealism?"⁴⁴ Trevor-Roper's grasp of the situation with the Führer proved correct, and his service to Britain would eventually draw him farther into the life of Hitler than anyone could have imagined at the time.

The young soldier took his first assignment under Walter Gill, a lecturer and bursar for Merton, Oxford in the Radio Security Service.⁴⁵ The goal of this unit was to identify radio signals that German spies would use in Britain as beacons to direct bombers to their marks.⁴⁶ It eventually became clear that such signals did not exist, but the Radio Security Service did discover other coded transmissions that were coming from the Germans. Trevor-Roper and Gill presented the encoded transmissions to Commander Alistair Denniston of Bletchley Park, but the Commander initially brushed off these findings, possibly due to a fear of loss of Secret Intelligence Service jurisdiction.⁴⁷ Trevor-Roper and Gill did not accept Denniston's dismissal of their discovery, and began working to decipher the coding on their own time when they were not

⁴¹ Ibid., 56.

⁴² Ibid., 70.

⁴³ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 77-78.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁷ Sisman, *An Honourable Englishman*, 81.

engaged in Radio Security Service assignments. Their efforts were rewarded when they began cracking more and more of the ciphers. The pair was eventually able to identify the messages they received as *Abwehr* transmissions from around the world.⁴⁸

Abwehr was the name for the German secret service, and the early Radio Security Service's work in cracking ciphers led to the eventual breaking of the *Abwehr* Enigma code.⁴⁹ Radio Security Service managed to maintain a level of importance to British intelligence by using their knowledge of *Abwehr* radio transmission code cracking to aid in the capture of German intelligence agents and assist with the British deception operations.⁵⁰ The Secret Intelligence Service eventually absorbed the Radio Security Service in May of 1941 in order to increase security and localize the two organizations' efforts.⁵¹ It was through Trevor-Roper's work with the Radio Security Service and Secret Intelligence Service that he eventually met Brigadier Dick White.

White recognized the importance of proving the death of Hitler immediately following the capitulation of Germany. The Brigadier was educated at Masterman's at Christ Church and is the only person to have been the head of MI5 before becoming the head of MI6.⁵² Along with the British vendetta against Hitler, White recognized Hitler's magnetism, which jeopardized security in the occupied zones as long as the Führer was rumored to be alive.⁵³ The Brigadier also recognized the atrocities that Hitler was responsible for and the chaos that could ensue if Hitler

⁴⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 81, 88.

⁵¹ Ibid., 88.

⁵² Ibid., 79.

⁵³ Sisman, *An Honourable Englishman*, 133.

returned in the same way that Napoleon did.⁵⁴ If the Allies failed to find Hitler there was a possibility that those once loyal to him would rally to his side if he turned up again.

White visited Berlin at the conclusion of the war to confirm Hitler's death and the Russians assured him that both Hitler and Goebbels had committed suicide. This story changed rapidly when Stalin began telling top members of the Allied forces that he was sure Hitler had not died, and at one point accused the British of sheltering the Führer.⁵⁵ This situation was unacceptable for the newly victorious British, and the need for a thorough and definitive investigation became more urgent. The Russians' distrust and lack of cooperation was the primary reason that the British launched an inquiry into the matter primarily on their own, although officially they were receiving help from the Americans and Canadians.⁵⁶

White was the head of counter intelligence in the British zone in 1945 when Trevor-Roper began paying visits to the castle that White had requisitioned for his own use during his stay in Bad Oeynhausen.⁵⁷ It was during these visits that White and Trevor-Roper began to discuss the events surrounding Hitler's last days. The speculation that spread so quickly throughout Europe due to the uncertainty surrounding the Führer's fate made an investigation absolutely necessary. White decided that Trevor-Roper was an excellent candidate to conduct such an inquiry, especially since the major already had experience in conducting interrogations of German prisoners and was eager to prove himself as a historian.⁵⁸

Trevor-Roper was 31 years old when White asked him in September of 1945 to investigate the evidence surrounding Hitler's death. The opportunity to solve one of the most

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 165.

⁵⁷ Sisman, *An Honourable Englishman*, 133.

⁵⁸ Sisman, *An Honourable Englishman*, 125.

dramatic mysteries in modern history was an excellent opportunity for an ambitious young scholar, and White assured the major that he would be given ample resources and authority to complete his work.⁵⁹ Trevor-Roper accepted his new mission and began the necessary preliminary work immediately. Trevor-Roper worked under the pseudonym of Major Oughton for the entirety of his investigation and enlisted the help of Americans, British, and Canadian officers alike. The Allies were cooperative at this point and willing to share information with Trevor-Roper, but each country also had individual agendas to see to in the immediate postwar period.

Trevor-Roper officially began his investigation on September 18th and by September 19th a list had been distributed to all British and American intelligence personnel in Europe of thirty names of individuals who could provide information regarding Hitler's death.⁶⁰ This list would grow quickly to eventually include the names of over sixty "persons of interest" wanted for questioning. Despite the long list of potential witnesses who could shed light on the last days of Hitler, only a small number were found in time for Trevor-Roper to include in his report before he announced his findings to the public on November 1, 1945.⁶¹

Major Peter Ramsbotham (another British officer and the coordinator for the Allied investigation) created and distributed the initial "persons of interest list" to all American and British intelligence officials in Europe. However, the process of finding and interrogating the people named in the initial list was made increasingly difficult due to the state that Germany was in.⁶² There was very little information that could be used to identify potential witnesses as physical descriptions were not always available and personnel were often only provided with a

⁵⁹ Ibid., 133.

⁶⁰ Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 169.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 169.

last name.⁶³ Trevor-Roper was also working without the help of both the French and the Russians. The French were simply absent from the investigation according to the archival documents, but the Russians refused to cooperate with Trevor-Roper's investigation although it was later discovered that they held nearly all of the witnesses whom the British deemed "missing".⁶⁴

Russia's main concern at the initial capitulation of Berlin was the capture of German resources that would benefit the Red Army and Stalin in particular. Their first focus was the acquisition of German workshops, laboratories, and factories. The Russians were also searching for resources to aid Operation Borodino, the Russian atomic program. In addition to these two concerns, the Russians were also searching for German scientists, engineers, V-2 rocket experts, and anyone else who could provide them with a technological advantage over the United States. Very few people of interest near the Russian lines managed to escape internment and make it to Western Allied lines once Germany capitulated.⁶⁵ The Russians' rapid gathering of resources would cause the United States to respond in kind, which had implications for the British investigation. Despite the difficulties associated with the loss of witnesses and Russian distrust, Trevor-Roper's investigation into Hitler's death continued at breakneck speed.

Trevor-Roper completed his assignment in less than two months and presented his findings to the international press at the Hotel Am Zoo in Berlin on November 1, 1945.⁶⁶ According to James P. O'Donnell, it was this report that finally convinced the authorities and

⁶³ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁵ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin, 1945*, 406.

⁶⁶ Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 165.

public alike that Hitler was dead.⁶⁷ Despite its conclusive findings, the report presented in Berlin on November 1 relied on the testimony of only nine witnesses out of the original list of thirty.⁶⁸ The remaining witnesses that would be included in Trevor-Roper's *The Last Days of Hitler* when it was published in 1947 were found after his presentation to the public. Trevor-Roper, on behalf of British intelligence, continued searching for witnesses long after November 1, 1945 in order to validate his previous claims and chase down any additional leads that had come up in his previous investigation – since he was planning to publish his findings. Unfortunately Trevor-Roper neglected to give the appropriate credit to those who had helped to make his investigation possible when the British findings were synthesized into his most memorable work. This oversight is the topic of Sarah Douglas's article "The Last Days of Hitler".

The sheer number of witnesses who testified about Hitler's death (some multiple times) demonstrates that it would have been logistically impossible for one man to complete even a fraction of the work necessary to confirm Hitler's death. Trevor-Roper had to have relied on the help of dozens of other officers and intelligence personnel in order to cover all of the topics that arose during questioning, especially since the witnesses were being held in different parts of Europe. One might think initially that Trevor-Roper was not at liberty to give the names of his associates at the time of the book's publishing, but the work's multiple editions mean that the proper credit could have been given at a later time. It also does not explain why Dick White is acknowledged for his role in the book's creation in the first edition's preface, but is not mentioned in later editions.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ From James P. O'Donnell, *The Bunker*. Houghton Mifflin, 1978. Print, cited in Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 165.

⁶⁸ Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 167.

⁶⁹ Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 163.

Based on her findings in the British archives, Sarah Douglas gave credit to the Americans in her article "The Last Days of Hitler" – although without visiting the NARA, she was unable to ascertain whether the Americans conducted their own investigation independent of the British investigation. My research shows that while the Americans provided two essential interrogations to the investigation into Hitler's death, they did not show the same level of interest as the British in carrying out their portion of the investigation. Trevor-Roper's investigation required that he and those helping him work all over the European Continent, and it was the British dedication to confirming Hitler's death that allowed American intelligence during these same two critical years to move on to other, more pressing, matters. The Americans, it turns out, had identified a more valuable use of their time and efforts in the occupied zones by the time Trevor-Roper presented his findings to the world.

Chapter 2: The American Investigation

The evidence in the National Archives at College Park of American involvement in Hugh Trevor-Roper's investigation was relatively limited for the period during which the British were conducting their research in 1945. However, the Americans were able to track down several leads in subsequent years that would add to the work of Trevor-Roper in proving that Hitler was dead. In 1945, the Americans interrogated Hanna Reitsch, a Nazi test pilot and the only woman awarded the Iron Cross First Class, Erich Kempka, Hitler's Chief Driver and head of the Führer's Motor Pool until the end of the war, and Eric Mansfeld, SS *Hauptscharführer* and bunker guard.⁷⁰ These reports were handed over to the British to aide in their investigation. In 1947 the United States also investigated a rumor that Hitler's own physician poisoned him and a separate statement that a Bulgarian dentist identified Hitler's jawbone for the Soviets. These reports show that the American contribution to Trevor-Roper's investigation was primarily qualitative and not quantitative. The United States was responsible for adding two of the most important interrogations to the inquiry, but the overall attitude towards Hitler's death was primarily reactive and not active.

The first part of Trevor-Roper's investigation and interrogation of witnesses took place from September 18, 1945 until his press conference and announcement of his findings to the public on November 1, 1945. The Americans conducted ten interviews of prisoners of war in the occupied zones during this time period. American intelligence officials carried out all interrogations of witnesses that the American troops in Europe held and formed reports on their findings.⁷¹ Of the ten interrogations that were carried out in the same period that Trevor-Roper

⁷⁰ Douglas, "The Search for Hitler," 168.

⁷¹ Box 1366, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports 1945-1945, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of

was finding witnesses, only two were actually related to Hitler's death. These were the interrogations of Hanna Reitsch, a Nazi test pilot and the only woman awarded the Iron Cross First Class, and Erich Kempka, Hitler's valet and chauffeur for the previous decade. The United States Forces European Theatre (USFET) also conducted the interrogation of Erich Mansfeld, but this report was not within the Historical Interrogation Committee file containing the rest of the interrogation reports from the immediate postwar period.⁷² I learned later that Mansfeld's interrogation report was in a record group that held information on WWII war crimes records and not in the Historical Interrogation Committee files that I was looking at. It is unclear why these reports were separated for administrative reasons or because of a difference in content.

The United States Forces in Austria interrogated Hanna Reitsch on October 8, 1945. Reitsch was one of the last (if not the last person) to escape the bunker and Berlin prior to Hitler's death and before the Red Army made a getaway impossible. The report starts off with an introduction explaining Reitsch's position in the Nazi hierarchy and qualifying her statements as her own perception of the final days of the war in the *Führerbunker*.⁷³ The report also explains Reitsch's excessive use of the word "honor" throughout her interrogation and the importance of this concept within the Nazi Party. This term was so heavily used by Reitsch that the interrogator eventually began adding quotation marks around the word each time it was used.⁷⁴

Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md.

⁷² Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 175.

⁷³ The Last Days in Hitler's Air Raid Shelter, October 8, 1945, Box 1359, pg. 1, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports 1945-1945, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, NARA.

⁷⁴ The Last Days in Hitler's Air Raid Shelter, October 8, 1945, Box 1359, pg. 2, Record Group 498, NARA.

Reitsch decided to fly to Berlin on April 26, 1945 with Lieutenant General Ritter von Greim, a German Field Marshal and the *Luftwaffe*'s final commander, whom Hitler had summoned to the Chancellery for what she was told was an urgent matter.⁷⁵ The report indicates that the flight was difficult as there were Russian-German dogfights going on around the area where they took off, and they fell under fire before the craft could land, injuring Greim's foot and making an emergency landing necessary.⁷⁶ They were able to find a vehicle to take them to the *Führerbunker* and presented themselves to Hitler upon their arrival at around 7:00pm on April 26, 1945.⁷⁷

At that point, according to the file, Hitler informed them of Hermann Göring's betrayal of having, "established connections with the enemy" and consequently made Greim the new *Luftwaffe* commander for the remainder of the war.⁷⁸ The news of Göring's betrayal was shocking to both Reitsch and Greim, and the pair begged to remain in the bunker with Hitler as a result. Hitler conceded, but arrangements had already been made for a plane to take Reitsch and Greim back to Rechlin. When a plane finally reached Berlin through Russian fire, it was sent away empty-handed because the two were still set on remaining with Hitler until the end.⁷⁹

Reitsch was later called into the Führer's office and given a vial of cyanide for her use should the Allies apprehend her in the coming days. It was at this point that Hitler made his intention of having his body burned known to Reitsch, who immediately began protesting. Hitler responded, "no, Hanna, if I die it is for the 'honor' of our country, it is because as a soldier I

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 4.

must obey my own command that I would defend Berlin to the last.”⁸⁰ This was the point at which Reitsch realized that Hitler believed the war to be lost. She returned to Greim and informed him of the development and they made plans for their suicide in case of their capture.⁸¹

Reitsch observed Goebbels in the final days in the bunker where the Minister of Propaganda spent quite a bit of time pacing and denouncing Göring's cowardice. According to Reitsch's testimony, Goebbels “strode about his small luxurious quarters like an animal, muttering vile accusations concerning the *Luftwaffe* leader and what he had done.”⁸² Goebbels also blamed the German army's current state on Göring and apparently planned to pin the Third Reich's eventual defeat on the traitor as well. Reitsch acknowledged that Goebbels had a flair for the dramatic and even said he “performed as if he were speaking to a legion of historians who were avidly awaiting and recording every word.”⁸³

Reitsch remarked on Hitler's decline following his outburst in the conference room (this outburst has been well documented by reproductions including the movie *Downfall*) and stated that he never quite recovered.⁸⁴ She said that he would regain his strength at times, for just long enough to make fantastic claims about how General Walther Wenck, commander of the twelfth army and Berlin's last hope for winning the Battle of Berlin, would turn the battle around and Germany would be saved.⁸⁵ Reitsch went on to completely dismiss the notion of Hitler's escape from the bunker. She stated that the Führer did not have the strength to make it out of Berlin,

⁸⁰ The Last Days in Hitler's Air Raid Shelter, October 8, 1945, Box 1359, pg. 4, Record Group 498, NARA.

⁸¹ Ibid., 5.

⁸² Ibid., 4-5.

⁸³ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁴ *Downfall*, Streaming, Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel (Munich, Germany: Constantin Film, 2004).

⁸⁵ The Last Days in Hitler's Air Raid Shelter, October 8, 1945, Box 1359, pg. 8, Record Group 498, NARA.

even if escape had been possible. When told that there were rumors of Hitler's survival, Reitsch responded, "Hitler is dead! The man I saw in the shelter could not have lived. He had no reason to live and the tragedy was that he knew it well; knew it better than perhaps anyone else did."⁸⁶

Reitsch greatly admired the Führer and, I believe, showed an unusual level of perception in addressing his shortcomings. She blamed the fall of Germany on him, but also on those who advised and directed him. Throughout the conversation she showed an awareness of the criminality and evil that Hitler perpetuated during his reign, but did not seem to hold him completely responsible for the consequences of his actions.⁸⁷

Reitsch talked about Himmler's betrayal as well as that of Göring, and its effect on the Führer.⁸⁸ It was this information that caused Hitler to order Greim and Reitsch to escape from the bunker. Hitler was concerned that a traitor would succeed him and the only visible solution was to send Greim and Reitsch out of Berlin with his orders. Reitsch recognized the absurdity of an escape attempt through enemy lines that far into the Russian assault on Berlin, but Hitler gave the order anyway.⁸⁹ Greim and Reitsch were both captured by the Americans in May of 1945, and Greim committed suicide on May 24, 1945 with his poison capsule that Hitler provided in April.⁹⁰

The interrogator believed that Reitsch's report was sincere and truthful based on her mission. He accepted her claim that she had been tempted to commit suicide, but decided that

⁸⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 11

⁹⁰ Ibid., 15.

she must tell the Allies the truth about Göring and Hitler as well as the German people about the dangers of a government like the Third Reich.⁹¹

The Americans completed the interrogation report in Austria before they handed it over to Trevor-Roper and British intelligence for their investigation file. Reitsch's testimony, along with six other sources, was used extensively in Trevor-Roper's report as well as his subsequent publication, *The Last Days of Hitler*.⁹² Reitsch later complained about the fact that Trevor-Roper used the information she provided and "drew far reaching conclusions" without ever speaking to her personally, especially since her testimony was one of the most important that Trevor-Roper relied on.⁹³ Despite the fact that Trevor-Roper's investigation confirmed that she left two days before Hitler committed suicide, her interrogation report indicated that the Americans believed at the time that she could have been one of the final people to leave the bunker alive. The fact that Reitsch's testimony made up half of the interrogation material on Hitler's death that the Americans completed supports the conclusion that they completed qualitative rather than quantitative work in their sector. A copy of the report can be found in the National Archives of the United Kingdom today.

The second relevant interrogation report in the Historical Interrogation Committee file is that of Erich Kempka, Hitler's Chief Driver and head of the Führer's Motor Pool until the end of the war. Kempka was 34 at the time of the interrogation, was initially hired by the Motor Pool in March of 1932 as a driver, but was promoted to Head Driver in 1936 after the death of the previous Head of the Motor Pool, SS *Brigadeführer* Julius Schrek. According to Kempka, his

⁹¹ The Last Days in Hitler's Air Raid Shelter, October 8, 1945, Box 1359, pg. 15, Record Group 498, NARA.

⁹² Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 188.

⁹³ Document 318A [pg. 113], WO 208/3791, TNA, cited in Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 175-176.

position required great organizational skills and punctuality, as Hitler's days were often planned down to thirty seconds.⁹⁴ This and other areas of Kempka's job required an attention to detail that would lend credence to his version of the events surrounding Hitler's death.⁹⁵ Lieutenant Colonel O.J. Hale conducted Kempka's interrogation, which took place at the Third Army Intelligence Center on September 26, 1945. The report's focus is on the final days leading up to, and circumstances, of Hitler's death, with an additional section for Kempka's supplementary statements.

Kempka was the chief witness in the matter of Hitler's death due to his extensive description of Hitler and Eva Braun's cremation. A Lieutenant Blake, who attempted to disprove or verify his report, also interrogated Kempka (date unknown).⁹⁶ The uniformity of his account throughout multiple interrogations convinced intelligence officers of his truthfulness on the subject.⁹⁷ Kempka seemed to recognize the historical importance of confirming Hitler's death, and made every effort to convince his interrogators that he had no motive to withhold or present false information. Kempka's disposition seems to have convinced the interrogators in charge of the report who said, "the general impression created by sources remarks and attitude is that of a credible witness."⁹⁸

The interrogators asked, "in your report how did you fix the Führer's death as occurring on 30 April instead of 1 May or 27 April?" Kempka responded that he placed the death on April

⁹⁴ Interrogation Report for Obersturmbannführer Erich Kempka, Chief Driver and Head of the Führer's Motor Pool, September 26, 1945, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports, 1945-1945, Box 1366, pg. 1, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, NARA.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁷ Interrogation Report for Obersturmbannführer Erich Kempka, Chief Driver and Head of the Führer's Motor Pool, September 26, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 1, Record Group 498, NARA.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

30, 1945 due to its proximity to the attempted escape by those still living in the bunker on May 1. Kempka spoke to Hitler for the last time on April 29 outside of the bunker, when the Führer inquired about the state of the remaining vehicles in the motor pool. He responded that they were in poor condition, but that it was still possible to transport supplies to area hospitals, to which Hitler offered words of encouragement before returning to the bunker.⁹⁹

Otto Gunsche, Hitler's personal adjutant, ordered Kempka to bring gasoline the following day in order to burn Hitler and Braun's bodies in the Reich Chancellery garden. Hans Linge, Hitler's valet, brought Hitler's body out of the bunker wrapped in a blanket, while Martin Bormann, Head of the Party Chancellery and Hitler's personal secretary, carried Eva Braun. Kempka states that wrapping Hitler in the blanket made it easier to carry him, and that this was not necessary for Eva Braun due to her slight stature.¹⁰⁰ He also stated that the picture of the crater that the Allies had taken did not depict the correct crater in which the bodies were burned, and that the correct crater was much shallower and much closer to the bunker. Kempka went into Hitler's apartment following the cremation to observe the room in which the Führer committed suicide, and judged that the pair had been dead between fifteen minutes and half an hour when their remains were cremated in the shell crater outside the bunker door.¹⁰¹

Kempka had little information regarding Hitler and Braun's marriage, and had only come across what little he knew in a peripheral manner. He had inquired as to whether another young couple in the bunker could apply to be married, and Dr. Goebbels's deputy, Dr. Naumann replied, "why did they not apply two days ago when the Führer and Fraulein Braun and two of

⁹⁹ Interrogation Report for Obersturmbannführer Erich Kempka, Chief Driver and Head of the Führer's Motor Pool, September 26, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 2, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 3.

the orderlies were married?" Kempka stated that Frau Traudl Junge, one of Hitler's secretaries, could provide more answers on the topic due to her closeness with Eva Braun.¹⁰²

Kempka did not believe that Martin Bormann could have escaped Berlin during the breakout, but, at this point, the Americans were not sure whether he was dead or alive. It is possible that the Americans were primarily interested in Bormann's whereabouts due to a desire to try him for war crimes. He believed that Bormann was either in Russian hands or had died in Berlin. He based this assumption on reports from a female party member of Ambassador Hewel's suicide via poison capsule following the second breakout's failure, of which Bormann was also a part.¹⁰³ The discovery of skeletal remains in the 1970's later confirmed Bormann's suicide during the Battle of Berlin.¹⁰⁴ Kempka remarked that Hitler was a kind and considerate superior who took his chauffeur's needs into consideration and often encouraged him to go and visit with his parents when they were in the Rhineland. When asked, the chauffeur also insisted that Hitler never used a body double as a form of protection and that the only attempts on the Führer's life were the bombing attempts at the *Burgerbraukeller* in 1939 and at the Reich Headquarters in 1944.¹⁰⁵

USFET recognized the importance of Kempka's testimony due to his witnessing the Führer's cremation, but, once again, did not seek additional information. The Americans also handed over Kempka's interrogation report to Trevor-Roper and British intelligence following its completion in September of 1945. Kempka went on to testify at the Nuremburg trials about his last encounter with Bormann, and was released from captivity in 1947. Kempka remained a

¹⁰² Interrogation Report for Obersturmbannführer Erich Kempka, Chief Driver and Head of the Führer's Motor Pool, September 26, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 3, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 149.

¹⁰⁵ Interrogation Report for Obersturmbannführer Erich Kempka, Chief Driver and Head of the Führer's Motor Pool, September 26, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 1, Record Group 498, NARA.

key witness for the Allies in the matter of Hitler's death, and the American interrogation report can also be found at the National Archives of the United Kingdom. The Americans only conducted two interrogations with direct ties to Hitler's death, but they are certainly two of the most important interrogations on the subject and factored heavily into Trevor-Roper's final report and subsequent publication.

The next group of relevant individuals captured by USFET was comprised of Hitler's doctors, including: Theo Morell, Hitler's Personal Physician; Erwin Giesing, *Oberstabsarzt* (medical staff officer); Walter Loehlein, Director of the Berlin University Eye Clinic; Karl Weber, Director of the Bad Nauheim Heart Institute; A. Nissle, Freiburg Research Institute; and E. Brinkmann of the Berlin Medical Diagnostic Institute. These doctors were interrogated in November of 1945 in order to create an extensive report on Hitler's health that would allow any corpse to be accurately identified as the Führer or definitively called an imposter.¹⁰⁶ The collective effort was called "Hitler as Seen by his Doctors". It was not clear from the archival documents how the doctors who contributed to the report came into United States' custody, but the report's comprehensive nature made it another valuable American contribution to the investigation.

The report is divided into sections with the first being a list of reasons for the report. These include providing information that could be used to identify Hitler's remains; providing data that could be used to debunk Hitler mythology; knowledge that could be used to discredit any persons who claim to be or claim to have spoken with Hitler in the coming years; and information about Hitler that could potentially be interesting to any future scientists, doctors or

¹⁰⁶ Hitler as Seen by His Doctors, November 29, 1945, Hitler as Seen by His Doctors (D000922), Box 8, pg. 1, Selected Printouts of Digital Intelligence and Investigative Dossiers from Impersonal Files, compiled ca. 1977 - ca. 2004, documenting the period 1933 - 1958, Record Group 319, NARA.

historians. The report goes on to give a brief medical history and then outlines Hitler's every aspect as Dr. Morell reported. The report concludes with a series of annexes that hold X-rays of Hitler's head as well as results from various examinations on the Führer.¹⁰⁷

The Americans handed the report over to Trevor-Roper and his colleagues on October 15, and it is assumed that he reviewed the information before making his statement to the press and the public on November 1.¹⁰⁸ This was the most detailed report that the Americans created focusing on Hitler that was created in 1945. A copy is available in the United Kingdom National Archives as well. "Hitler as seen by his doctors" was the last significant report American intelligence personnel completed that had any relevance to Hitler's death until almost two years later. Trevor-Roper began writing *The Last Days of Hitler* at the beginning of 1946 and finished in mid May. The Americans and British continued to forward information to the British following Trevor-Roper's to civilian life in mid 1946.¹⁰⁹ The book was finally published a year later, which happened to be at the same point in 1947 that brought another lead to the Americans' attention.

The next investigation into Hitler's death was an inquiry into claims Dr. Erwin Giesing made in 1944. Giesing was an ear nose and throat physician who examined Hitler following the July 1944 attempt on the Führer's life, and remained in his employment until October 1944. Giesing started the rumor (possibly with the help of Dr. Karl Brandt, another of Hitler's physicians) that Dr. Morell, Hitler's primary care physician, had been poisoning the Führer while caring for him. Giesing was a natural competitor for Dr. Theodor Morell's job as Hitler's caretaker, and had adequate reason to fabricate such a story. The Americans heard this rumor

¹⁰⁷ Hitler as Seen by His Doctors, November 29, 1945, Hitler as Seen by His Doctors (D000922), Box 8, pg. 2, Record Group 319, NARA.

¹⁰⁸ Douglas, "The Last Days of Hitler," 174.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 188.

from members of Hitler's entourage in 1947, and had even more reason to investigate Giesing's claims following the publication of an article titled "The Secret of Dr. Morell" on February 8, 1947 in the British zone on the subject on February 8, 1947.¹¹⁰

The 7707th European Intelligence Command Center issued a report on October 4, 1947 that attempted to disprove this rumor and dismiss its root as occupational jealousy on the part of Giesing and Brandt. The report's introduction gives further explanation as to Giesing's desire to replace Morell as Hitler's primary care physician, and supports the claim that the rumor of poisoning was a pure fabrication through passages taken from Morell's own diary. Morell describes a conversation he had with Karl Brandt in 1944 before saying, "now I realize quite clearly why Hitler told me that I have a great many enemies who already have a successor at hand for me."¹¹¹

United States authorities began their inquiry into the rumor that Morell had been poisoning Hitler by compiling a list of medicines that Dr. Morell gave Hitler, and submitted these findings to several scientists who confirmed that no narcotics had been administered.¹¹² Authorities also contacted department heads that had control over the flow of narcotics in Berlin and confirmed that no narcotics had been delivered to Hitler's headquarters except in negligible amounts. The only reports that narcotics were administered to Hitler were not backed up by factual evidence and were therefore discredited. United States personnel began to explore

¹¹⁰ "The Rumored Poisoning of Hitler," October 4, 1945, Hitler, Rumored Poisoning of (XE050394), Box 9, pg. 7, Selected Printouts of Digital Intelligence and Investigative Dossiers from Impersonal Files, compiled ca. 1977 - ca. 2004, documenting the period 1933 - 1958, Record Group 319, NARA.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 3.

¹¹² Ibid.

different avenues since there was no clear explanation for Hitler's deterioration based on the medication that Dr. Morell gave him.¹¹³

The scientists who were consulted about the possibility of Hitler's use of narcotics submitted in their reports that a possible cause for Hitler's mental and physical state was the amount of stress he endured for years at a time.¹¹⁴ The report also suggests that the July 20, 1944 attempt on his life caused Hitler to deteriorate even more rapidly, and mentions the palsy in his left hand and foot that he exhibited in his final years. American investigators also included information in the 1947 report from a man who had served in Hitler's company during WWI as a sergeant who said that, "Hitler had always been considered 'nuts' by the other men of the company and that Hitler used to isolate himself in a corner and brood and mumble to himself."¹¹⁵

The report comes to the following conclusions based on the evidence the doctors, the scientists, and the German sergeant presented: Morell did not poison Hitler, but actually improved his health significantly; Morell's reputation made him susceptible to such rumors; the rumor could have been resuscitated in order to create a stab in the back claim; Hitler did not change psychologically, but was physically sick from his youth, and any rapid physical deterioration could have been caused by preexisting psychological abnormalities; and it is highly possible that Hitler had both schizophrenia and Parkinson's disease.¹¹⁶

The report goes on to recommend that further investigations be done into Hitler's youth to shed more light on the claims of schizophrenia and Parkinson's.¹¹⁷ I believe that it is possible that this investigation was necessary to disprove the poison rumor in order to deprive the German

¹¹³ "The Rumored Poisoning of Hitler," October 4, 1945, Hitler, Rumored Poisoning of (XE050394), Box 9, pg. 4, Record Group 319, NARA.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

people of a second “stab in the back” myth that could claim the Allies did not defeat Hitler, and that his own physician was responsible. This would be very interesting considering the similar mythology following Germany's defeat in WWI that stated that Germany's home front betrayed her, especially the republicans.

The report's end is made up of annexes containing parts of an article on Dr. Morell, the report on the possibility that Hitler used narcotics, a report on Hitler's doctors, and a report on how Hitler's health possibly affected his actions.¹¹⁸ The late issuance of the report indicates that the Americans were not aware of the rumor until 1947, and then worked quickly to disprove it when various former members of Hitler's entourage mentioned it in their interrogations.¹¹⁹ This, in turn, supports the claim that the Americans investigated in a reactive manner rather than an active one.

The next inquiry regarding Hitler's death took place a year later in 1948. From the American point of view, Hitler's remains were still missing despite Trevor-Roper's conviction that the Führer was dead. Fox Mathews, a former employee of the European Command Intelligence Center in Berlin, approached the Americans and indicated that the Russians could be responsible for the lack of information on the subject. Distrust between the Russians and their former Allies was growing by this point and neither side could count on the other for complete and honest information. The Russians felt as though they had sacrificed the most in the war, and had not received due credit from their associates.

On November 25, 1947, a report was filed with USFET, which stated that a man named Fox Mathews came forward and informed officials that the European Command Intelligence

¹¹⁸ “The Rumored Poisoning of Hitler,” October 4, 1945, Hitler, Rumored Poisoning of (XE050394), Box 9, pg. 3, Record Group 319, NARA.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Center in Berlin previously employed him and that he was currently working for the Political Section, Office of Military Government, Berlin Sector. Mathews worked as an interrogator for ECIC and informed officials that a man who was formerly Hitler's dentist told him that the Russians had requested that he identify a jawbone as belonging to Hitler. The man had complied, but two months later he was asked to report to Soviet authorities once again.¹²⁰ This dentist was not heard from again, prompting the need for the official report that Mr. Mathews submitted.

An agent spoke with Mr. Mathews again on November 26, 1947 and attempted to clarify a few points from the original story. The report stated that Mathews spoke with Hugo Blaschke, Hitler's former dentist, in October of 1945. The report went on to state that Blaschke's assistant and secretary were apprehended by the Russians and asked about a jawbone that the Russians' believed belonged to Hitler.¹²¹ The only problem with Mathews's story was that Hugo Blaschke insisted that he had never furnished Mathews with the story and was unaware of its origin.¹²²

The investigation continued, and on March 17, 1948 a report was filed that said that in Mathews's most recent interrogation, it was learned that it was not Hugo Blaschke who had told the jawbone story to Mathews, but Fedor Bruck.¹²³ It is possible that the confusion between the two names comes from their general similarity and the shared profession of the two men. This information was also several years old and was not as fresh in Mathews's mind. Bruck was interrogated and confirmed that the Russians apprehended Blaschke's former assistant, Fritz

¹²⁰ Internal Route Slip: Investigation of Hitler's Death, November 25, 1947, Hitler Death Reports, Box 820, pg. 1, Record Group 549: Records of United States Army, Europe, 1942 - 1991, NARA.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²² Internal Route Slip: Request for Further Interrogations on Hitler's Death, February 9, 1948, Hitler Death Reports, Box 820, pg. 1, Record Group 549: Records of United States Army, Europe, 1942 - 1991, NARA.

¹²³ Memorandum to the Assistant Deputy Director of Intelligence, March 17, 1948, Hitler Death Reports, Box 820, pg. 1, Record Group 549: Records of United States Army, Europe, 1942 - 1991, NARA.

Echtman, and Blaschke's former female secretary (Mathews could not remember her name), and asked them to identify Hitler's jawbone in 1945.¹²⁴ In March of 1948, Dr. Rohkamm, another of Blaschke's former assistants, identified the secretary as Katherine Hausermann, and with this information, the Americans continued searching for the pair.¹²⁵

The Americans did not know the location of the named witnesses at this time, and, from their perspective, the witnesses could have still been in Russian hands. Bruck took over Blaschke's dental office in late 1945, and told the story of the jawbone to Mathews in 1946.¹²⁶ The Americans located Dr. Bruck and questioned him on his involvement in Mathews's story. In his interrogation, Bruck said that Soviets had come to his office and mentioned Blaschke. When he asked them about the reason for their visit they asked Bruck for Hitler's dental records. Bruck could not furnish these, but took them to the home of Katherine Hausermann who was able to make drawings of the work Blaschke's office had done. When these were completed, Hausermann said that it was possible that Hitler's dental records could be found in the Chancellery. The Russians took Hausermann to the Chancellery, but no records were found.¹²⁷ Hausermann was detained for a total of forty-eight hours, and after she was returned to her family, Fritz Echtmann was detained for two days also. Bruck also mentioned a Bulgarian dentist

¹²⁴ Memorandum to the Assistant Deputy Director of Intelligence, March 17, 1948, Hitler Death Reports, Box 820, pg. 1, Record Group 549, NARA.

¹²⁵ Memorandum for the Officer in Charge: Death of Adolf Hitler, March 5, 1948, Hitler Death Reports, Box 820, pg. 1, Record Group 549: Records of United States Army, Europe, 1942 - 1991, NARA.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Memorandum to the Assistant Deputy Director, Intelligence Division: Latest Developments in Investigation of Hitler's Death, August 27, 1948, Hitler Death Reports, Box 820, pg. 2, Record Group 549: Records of United States Army, Europe, 1942 - 1991, NARA.

who acted as an interpreter throughout this ordeal, and this man was later identified as Dr. Michael Arnaudow, a Bulgarian dentist.¹²⁸

Officials contacted Dr. Arnaudow, but had a difficult time convincing him to provide information to the Americans because he feared they were Russian spies sent to trap him and he feared for the safety of his family and himself.¹²⁹ He was eventually convinced and confirmed Bruck and Mathews's story. Arnaudow was given drawings of Hitler's jawbone that Hausermann and Echtmann made and was then shown a jawbone and asked to confirm whether or not the drawings represented the same person. Arnaudow stated that, based on the drawings the assistant and secretary made, he was able to identify Hitler's jawbone "with a great degree of certainty but he could not identify Eva Braun's jawbone with the same degree of certainty."¹³⁰

The report recommended Arnaudow's removal from Berlin and that the Americans offer him a post in the US. It also recommended that once this happened, Arnaudow write a full report on his experience with Hitler's jawbone and the Russians.¹³¹ Unfortunately, the last paper in the file indicates that in October of 1948, this request was denied and the case was considered closed.¹³² No further records of Arnaudow or his family were in the related files, and the full report was never created. This concluded the American efforts to investigate the manner of Hitler's death in the post war period.

¹²⁸ Memorandum to the Assistant Deputy Director, Intelligence Division: Latest Developments in Investigation of Hitler's Death, August 27, 1948, Hitler Death Reports, Box 820, pg. 3, Record Group 549, NARA.

¹²⁹ Death of Adolf Hitler, September 8, 1948, Hitler Death Reports, Box 820, pg. 1, Record Group 549: Records of United States Army, Europe, 1942 - 1991, NARA.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Teletype Message to the Commanding Officer of Region VIII, October 1948, Hitler, Jawbone Investigation of (D206014), Box 9, pg. 1, Selected Printouts of Digital Intelligence and Investigative Dossiers from Impersonal Files, compiled ca. 1977 - ca. 2004, documenting the period 1933 - 1958, Record Group 319, NARA.

The certainty with which the case was closed seems to indicate that not only did the Americans accept Trevor-Roper's conclusions about Hitler's suicide, but they also accepted that the new information from the jawbone interrogation was more than enough to confirm Trevor-Roper's narrative. Once again, the Americans' only action related to Hitler's death was reactive based on new information. Moving forward, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) would be in charge of handling future claims of Hitler's survival and movement around the globe.

Letters began arriving at the FBI beginning immediately after the war, and citizens all over the country insisted that they knew the whereabouts of Hitler. Someone from Mexico wrote asking for money in order to provide information as to Hitler's whereabouts.¹³³ Another letter written in 1951 was concerned about the treatment of a Mr. Fuehr at an area hospital and was convinced that this was Hitler. The writer was also convinced that Hitler had spent the previous winter in South Beach bussing tables in order to learn English.¹³⁴ One man was even interviewed in Dayton, Ohio in 1955 saying that he had seen Hitler in Buenos Aires several years earlier.¹³⁵ None of these letters were followed up with investigations or reports, and it is unclear exactly how many the FBI received, but there did not seem to be any real sense of urgency in following up with the claims made in them.

¹³³ Letter From HASDESXZFC BBGFOIJIU M. to the US Investigation Department, May 30, 1948, pg. 1, Series: Headquarters Files from Classification 65 (Espionage) Released Under the Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Disclosure Acts, compiled 03/22/1935 - 01/20/1982, documenting the period 10/22/1923 - 01/20/1982, Record Group 65, NARA.

¹³⁴ Letter From A Friend to J. Edgar Hoover, November 30, 1951, pg. 1, Series : Headquarters Files from Classification 65 (Espionage) Released Under the Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Disclosure Acts, compiled 03/22/1935 - 01/20/1982, documenting the period 10/22/1923 - 01/20/1982, Record Group 65, NARA.

¹³⁵ Letter From W.A. Voice to the Director of the FBI, January 19, 1955, pg. 1, Series: Headquarters Files from Classification 65 (Espionage) Released Under the Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Disclosure Acts, compiled 03/22/1935 - 01/20/1982, documenting the period 10/22/1923 - 01/20/1982, Record Group 65, NARA.

The FBI did not seem particularly bothered by the claims sent in, despite the fact that a large number of citizens were not convinced that Hitler had died in the *Führerbunker*. This indicates that Trevor-Roper's report convinced the government, but did not make that conviction clear to at least a portion of the general public who still wanted answers. The decision not to create an additional report with Dr. Arnaudow further indicates that American intelligence believed Hitler was dead and that additional work on the matter was unnecessary. There is a report in the FBI files that talks about *The Last Days of Hitler* and what an excellent source it is on Hitler's death.¹³⁶ The British provided this information in 1947 and discusses Hitler's death with certainty, but acknowledges that no remains were ever found.¹³⁷ Perhaps with Dr. Arnaudow's testimony, the Americans became completely convinced of Trevor-Roper's explanation of Hitler's final days.

The interrogations of Reitsch and Kempka were absolutely necessary in proving Hitler committed suicide in the bunker. The investigations that were carried out in later years regarding the rumor of Hitler's poisoning and the identification of Hitler's jawbone also added a substantial amount of information to Trevor-Roper's initial report. The Americans contributed quality information on Hitler's last days during Trevor-Roper's investigation in late 1945 rather than a large quantity of information. It is very possible that they trusted the British to complete the investigation on their own and assumed a reactive stance in further instances when Hitler's death became relevant as with the rumored poisoning and the story about Hitler's jawbone.

¹³⁶ Office Memorandum from D.M. Ladd to the Director: The Last Days of Hitler, January 7, 1947, pg. 1, Series: Headquarters Files from Classification 65 (Espionage) Released Under the Nazi War Crimes and Japanese Imperial Government Disclosure Acts, compiled 03/22/1935 - 01/20/1982, documenting the period 10/22/1923 - 01/20/1982, Record Group 65, NARA.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

Chapter 3: The Interrogations

The interrogations of captured prisoners of war in the occupied zones began immediately after the war's end and continued for months. The archival files on these interrogations are, as we have just seen, surprisingly devoid of information regarding Hitler's death. This is the first

clue that something more pressing was going on behind the scenes. Further research into the subject at College Park, Maryland showed that not only were American intelligence officials between 1945 and 1947 targeting a particular type of prisoner of war, but also they were not asking questions that displayed an interest in Hitler's death. The records in the National Archives indicate instead that the Americans were already trying to gather information on German foreign policy during the war, foreign labor and how it helped to keep the German war machine running, censorship and the press's role in the war, and the German standard of living throughout the war. This information would allow the Americans to understand how Hitler controlled the masses and motivated them to keep fighting, even in the face of defeat.

The Russians were also interested in gathering information from the Germans while the British were investigating the circumstances of Hitler's death.¹³⁸ Tensions between the two countries escalated quickly and each made it an immediate priority to begin gathering as much intelligence from German persons of interest as possible. Russian and American instrumentalization of German know-how right after the war led to the internment of the country's top minds for the purpose of researching the way in which Germany maintained its nation throughout the war. In exchange for valuable information, the future Cold War antagonists were willing to re-employ some of the most active Nazis rather than punish them. The Russians' poor reputation among German prisoners aided the Americans in this endeavor. Former civil servants (some party affiliated, some not) who remained in Germany were aware of Russian cruelty and oppression, and many fled to Western Allied lines with the hope of trading knowledge for pardons. The Americans took advantage of the negative public relations to gather

¹³⁸ Matthias Juidt and Burghard Ciesla, *Technology Transfer Out of Germany After 1945*, (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 37.

as many persons of interest to them as possible in the occupied zones during the second half of 1945.

As noted above, forty-three interrogations were documented in the archival material between July of 1945 and October of 1945. Ten of these interrogations took place during the time period that Trevor-Roper conducted his initial investigation from September 18, 1945 through November 1, 1945. The remaining thirty-three were completed prior to September, and of the ten completed during Hugh Trevor-Roper's inquiry, only Kempka's and Reitsch's interrogations contained information directly relevant to Hitler's death.¹³⁹ The remaining forty-one interrogations appear to have been part of the beginning of an effort to recover information on a variety of useful topics for enhancing the future of American security in a bi-polar world from German civil servants.

The forty-one documents that do not discuss Hitler's death were focused on the way in which Germany conducted the war, and the subsequent impact of this war on the public.¹⁴⁰ The Americans recognized the opportunity that presented itself when they were able to capture members of a fallen state that had come dangerously close to controlling the entire European continent.

The Americans interrogated seven people on the various German campaigns launched during the Second World War.¹⁴¹ Hermann Göring, President of the Reichstag and Reichsmarshal of the *Luftwaffe*, was the only subject in this group that was not interrogated

¹³⁹ Box 1366, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports 1945-1945, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Box 1366, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports 1945-1945, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, NARA.

during September of 1945. His interrogation, instead, took place on July 19 and 20, 1945.

USFET intelligence officials in the occupied zones questioned the other six relevant prisoners.

RH Brock and Dr. George H. Shuster questioned General Heinz Guderian, a Panzer commander during campaigns in Poland, France and Russia, on the Russian campaign on September 7, 1945.

The lines of questioning were similar throughout each of the interrogations with the focus on planning and logistics.

The other prisoners of war who were questioned on the German military and its goals included: Adolf Heusinger, Chief Operations Divisions, German Army General Staff; General Fieldmarshal Albert Kesselring; Walter Warlimont, Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces Operations Staff; Col. Gen. Johannes Blaskowitz, Commander of the 8th Army in Poland, Commander in Chief East 1940, and Commander of the 1st Army in France; and Reichsmarshal Hermann Göring. US intelligence questioned Adolf Heusinger twice on two separate campaigns, and interrogated Hermann Göring on other issues in addition to his testimony on the German campaign in Russia.

Göring's interrogation was important because of his proximity to Hitler and knowledge of military planning strategies. Göring was able to answer many questions for the Americans and provide a glimpse into Nazi party life during the war. The final part of the interrogation probably did not provide much information that the Americans did not already have, but was rather a confirmation of what they had previously suspected.

Göring's interrogation was the first included in the Historical Interrogation Commission file and took place on July 19 and 20, 1945. The questioning was conducted at Ashcan, "a Top Secret interrogation facility in Luxembourg...where they would be squeezed for information

before facing judgment at Nuremberg.”¹⁴² Dr. George N. Shuster and Lt. Col. OJ Hale conducted the interrogation.¹⁴³ When asked about German relations with the British and whether or not Hitler ever sought a compromise that would avoid conflict between the two, Göring talked about the Sudetenland crisis in 1938 and the subsequent march into Austria.¹⁴⁴ It seemed during this part of the report that the agents were attempting to understand Hitler's decision-making process and the degree to which he relied on his advisors when making decisions.

When asked whether or not Hitler prepared his speeches with the help of his advisors, Göring insisted that the Führer had no aid in writing, but would occasionally ask for data to include. He stated that, “Hitler was pathologically proud of his ability as a public speaker.”¹⁴⁵ It appeared as though Göring was asked about Hitler's speeches in order to determine whether Hitler was the public speaking genius that he appeared to be. Hitler's speeches effectively mesmerized the masses and the ability to write such speeches was incredibly useful in motivating and mobilizing a nation.

Göring spoke of his plan to invade the Mediterranean in order to seal off the region from the British with help from the French, Italians, and Spanish. This plan was never put into action because the French wanted a number of concessions for their cooperation, the Italians did not want the Germans to become the premier power in the Mediterranean, and Spain was drawn into conflict with Vichy France over a difference of opinion. The Italians' jealousy over the success of Germany's initial conquests and military prowess resulted in a misguided campaign into

¹⁴² Jacobsen, *Operation Paperclip*, 135.

¹⁴³ Interrogation Report for Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, July 19-20, 1945, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports, 1945-1945, Box 1366, pg. 1, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

Greece. The British intervened and the Germans were forced to send aid to their ally in the south. According to the report, Göring stated that, "Italy's attack upon Greece was an adventure...It was inspired mainly by considerations of prestige." The miscommunication between the countries was twofold, as the Germans had not kept the Italians informed about their plans either.¹⁴⁶ This discussion over the Mediterranean and the Balkans seemed to answer logistical questions that would have arisen following the Italians' puzzling move to invade Greece.

The interrogators went on to ask Göring about German relations with the Russians throughout the war. Göring stated that the root of tensions between the two countries lay in their contradictory beliefs. Russia believed that Europe was merely an extension of Asia while the Germans believed that Germany was the core of Europe and was required for the European Continent's survival.¹⁴⁷ Göring stated that many native Germans thought positively of the Russians, but this was not enough to ensure a stable relationship between the two military superpowers. According to Göring, Hitler began to fear that the Russians were attempting to gain the upper hand in Europe so that they could eventually overtake the Germans, but Göring never mentioned communism, or race as a factor in the decision to invade Russia.¹⁴⁸ This omission is likely due to Göring's desire to gain sympathy from his American captors who would not likely tolerate explanations that involved communism or ethnic cleansing. Hitler became more convinced of the Russian threat as the British refused to surrender during the Battle of Britain.

¹⁴⁶ Interrogation Report for Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, July 19-20, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 4, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Interrogation Report for Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, July 19-20, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 4, Record Group 498, NARA.

The Führer resolved to take care of Russia, and decided that the German army could accomplish this by the end of 1941.¹⁴⁹

Göring claimed that he attempted to convince Hitler not to implement his plan to invade the Soviet Union, but Hitler still decided to invade anyway. According to Goring, no one would challenge Hitler's decision based on the French campaign's recent success. The Führer proposed a three-pronged attack into the heart of Russia, and reinforcements from the Panzer divisions at the outsides of the campaign. This attempt failed, and Hitler blamed the loss on Heinz Guderian, a German Panzer General who, Hitler claimed, did not advance quickly enough in the south. Hitler also blamed the Russian campaign's loss on heavy rains in the beginning that made it difficult for tanks to maneuver.¹⁵⁰ The section of testimony seemed to indicate that Hitler made the decision to invade Russia despite his advisors' warnings and then accepted none of the blame when the campaign failed.

The final part of Göring's interview dealt with the German declaration of war on the United States. Göring felt as though the declaration was due to feelings of gratitude toward the Japanese for their role in the Pearl Harbor attacks. He claimed that word of the attack came as a complete surprise to the Germans, but was not an unpleasant one. The Germans also felt as though war with the United States was inevitable, especially after the reelection of President Roosevelt. Göring admitted that Hitler might have acted impulsively based on the available information.¹⁵¹

The archival documents in the Historical Interrogation Committee file discussed many different topics with former German civil servants. Göring was interrogated to learn more

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Interrogation Report for Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, July 19-20, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 6, Record Group 498, NARA.

information about German foreign policy with regard to England, Russia and the Mediterranean, and Herman Neubacher, Reich Plenipotentiary for the Southeast and Special Economic Envoy in the Balkans, was asked similar questions. Lt. Col. OJ Hale interrogated Neubacher in the United States occupied zone on October 3 and 4 in 1945 about his involvement with and knowledge of German foreign policy in the Balkans.

The report gave initial information regarding Neubacher's personal data and his career accomplishments. The second section focused on German foreign policy with Romania (written "Rumania") and the oil crisis. War had caused the price of oil to rise to three times its normal price, and Romania refused to sell to Germany, leaving Neubacher with an economic problem.¹⁵² He learned that a greater force influencing Romanian policy than a dislike of Germany was a fear of Russia. Neubacher used this knowledge to create an offer that would be acceptable to the Romanians, who severely lacked weapons with which to defend themselves. Neubacher negotiated with the Romanians and arranged the "Oil-Weapons Accord" in May of 1940. In this setup, the Romanians would receive arms from the Germans, and ship oil in return. This arrangement continued throughout the war until the Americans destroyed the Romanian refineries and oil fields, and transportation became impossible.¹⁵³

Neubacher talked briefly about the economic situation in Greece and said that he was primarily concerned with the shortage of available food and the inflation of Greek currency.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Interrogation Report for Doctor Hermann Neubacher, October 3-4, 1945, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports, 1945-1945, Box 1366, pg. 3, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁵³ Interrogation Report for Doctor Hermann Neubacher, October 3-4, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 3, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

Neubacher went on to discuss the alliance with Italy and its implications for the Mediterranean world. Germany made large concessions in order to bring the Italians on board including:

1. The destruction of Yugoslavia
2. The founding of an independent Croatia under Italian influence
3. The surrender of Montenegro and the Sanjak to Italy
4. Italian control of Albania
5. The declaration of an Italian economic sphere in Greece¹⁵⁵

Neubacher went on to say that this policy was disastrous for the German campaign in the Mediterranean. It incited Serbian, Albanian, and Greek hostility towards the Germans and left Germany with an incompetent and mindful appendage in the south that contributed little to the war effort.¹⁵⁶

The Italian decline and subsequent surrender to the Allies left a nightmarish situation for the Germans in the Balkans. All relationships had been severed and the Germans were facing opposition from many of the occupied countries.¹⁵⁷ Neubacher claimed that he created a program that was designed to retrain German troops to deal with Serbian nationalism and slowly win the Serbs back over to the German side. "The central feature of the source's plan was the shifting of the axis of German policy from the Croats to the Serbs by satisfying the aspirations of Serb nationalists and enlisting them wholeheartedly in, 'the struggle against Bolshevism'."¹⁵⁸ He also wanted to reunify Serbia, Montenegro, and the Sanjak in order to gain favor with the Serbians, but Hitler denied this request.¹⁵⁹ Neubacher's report ends with his criticism of German Croat policy, and the assertion that Serbian nationalism could have been a valuable tool for the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Interrogation Report for Doctor Hermann Neubacher, October 3-4, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 5, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 6.

Germans. He remarked, "Tito will never uproot Serb nationalism; the Serbian peasants will never be communist."¹⁶⁰

Neubacher's interrogation was different from Göring's in that Neubacher was not a fanatic party member (according to the interrogators' observations) and he was more concerned with economics and foreign policy rather than attack plans. The Americans were able to gain information from Neubacher that helped them understand how occupied zones were administered.

The Americans had a similar discussion with Werner von Bargaen, Plenipotentiary of the Northern Office in France and Belgium. Lt. Col. OJ Hale interrogated von Bargaen on August 13, 1945. The report states that von Bargaen was only a member of the party in order to keep his job, and expressed disgust at the Führer and the Nazi Party in general.¹⁶¹ He was asked questions about the political situation in Belgium during the occupation and about the German term "New Order" that encompassed future plans for Europe.¹⁶² Von Bargaen also discussed the Belgians in racial terms saying, "in their [Himmler and Hitler's] opinion the Flemings were Germanic and they even discovered through the researches of an SS historian that the Walloons were also racially Germanic, although unfortunately they had acquired a Romance tongue."¹⁶³ It is possible that von Bargaen brought this point up in an attempt to demonstrate tolerance on his part, but the Americans do not comment on the statement.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶¹ Interrogation Report for Werner Von Bargaen, August 13, 1945, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports, 1945-1945, Box 1366, pg. 1, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁶² Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁶³ Interrogation Report for Werner Von Bargaen, August 13, 1945, Box 1366, pg. 1, Record Group 498, NARA.

The Americans continued asking the same types of questions of all prisoners of war with a background in foreign policy. These subjects included: Edmund Veessenmayer, German Minister Plenipotentiary of Hungary; Kurt von Kamphoevener, *Vortragender Legationsrat* in the Foreign Service; General Ernst Kostring, Military Attaché in Moscow; and Arthur Seyss-Inquart, Reich Commissioner for the Occupied Netherlands. The reports give the impression that the captors were not hostile toward the majority of their subjects. There are several possible explanations for this including excellent behavior on the part of the prisoners in order to gain favor from their captors and the American and German shared hatred of the Russians. The focus on German foreign policy was a large part of the early prisoner of war interrogations and bolsters the claim that the Americans were highly interested in German intelligence. Knowledge of German foreign policy could be useful in the future for preventing another world war, but it was not the Americans' only area of concentration.

The second major theme throughout the interrogations in the Historical Interrogation Commission file was a focus on the actions of members of the German press throughout the war. Six of the forty-three interrogations were directly focused on the role the press played both on the home front as well as in the occupied countries and the control that the government exercised over the media. Five of the interviews took place in late August within ten days of each other, but one outlier was not completed until late September. The most substantial report on the matter was Max Amann's, the Reich Leader of the Press and President of the Reich Press Chamber. OJ Hale interrogated Amann on August 22, 1945, and stated in his report that he had mixed feelings on the naiveté and Nazi involvement of his subject. Amann renounced Nazi ideology and harbored no positive feelings toward Hitler, but was responsible for many of the major initiatives

that the Nazi Party's major publishing house, *Franz Eher Verlag*, carried out.¹⁶⁴ I believe that Amann was more sympathetic to the Nazi Party than he lets on, but understood his audience and hoped to win favor with his captors.

The interrogators were interested in the organizational structure of the national press and the level to which Hitler dictated the publications. Amann responded that there were originally newspapers for each Gauleiter (regional Party leaders), but "Hitler saw the danger of individual Gauleiters and other party leaders owning and directing their own papers." The Führer also thought of the press as a mouthpiece for the government and did not believe that there should be any privately owned press companies.¹⁶⁵ The Nazi Party had oppressive control over German newspapers, and maintained this monopoly throughout the war's trials including bombings and shortages in material.

These questions were indicative of those posed to the other five men who were interviewed on the subject of the Nazi press monopoly including: Rolf Hoffman, Chief of the Foreign Press Department of the NSDAP; Eugen Maier, Head of the Munich office of the Reich Press Chief; Dr. Paul Schmidt, Chief of the Press Section in the German Foreign Office; Wilhelm Weiss, Editor in Chief of the *Volkischer Beobachter* and Head of the Reich Association of the German Press; and Frans Rudolf, the Deputy Chief of the Foreign Department of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*.

The Americans were able to gather a significant amount of information on the way in which the German government manipulated the masses through the use of political propaganda.

¹⁶⁴ Interrogation Report for Max Amann, August 22, 1945, Historical Interrogation Commission Interrogation Reports, 1945-1945, Box 1366, pg. 1, Interrogation Summaries, compiled 1945-1946, Records of Headquarters, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (World War II), 1942 - 1947, Record Group 498, NARA.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

The use of the press allowed the Party to control the public and portray losses as victories and crises as strategic setbacks. This fascination with the German press and control of the media appeared in multiple interrogations that the Americans completed. It is possible that the information would inform future wartime decisions about the dissemination of information and the press' role during conflicts in the United States. It is also possible that this information was seen as vital in ensuring that Germany could not start another world war. The Americans gathered this information in addition to intelligence on German foreign policy and reports on the German campaigns into Russia, Poland, France, Belgium, North Africa, and the Mediterranean.

The remaining interrogations in the Historical Interrogation Committee file discussed local administration and civil service programs such as firefighting and the standard of living in Germany during the war. The firefighting reports were very specific to the Berlin firehouses, and indicated an interest in learning about how German public servants combatted the destruction caused by the various bombing campaigns that wreaked havoc on Berlin. The press's role wartime affairs and the planning and implantation of plans to invade various European countries were the Americans' primary concerns. Other topics were discussed during these interrogations, usually specific to the position of the person who was being interrogated, but the two main subjects were clear when reading through the majority of the reports.

The information that was reported from these interrogations was important enough to consume the Americans' time while their British counterparts were searching for answers as to what happened in Hitler's bunker. The information in the Historical Interrogation Committee file is not as conventionally intriguing or controversial as the information that Operation Paperclip would become famous for, but the reports clearly indicate that the Americans were trying to understand the Nazi hierarchy and also to understand the reasoning behind some of the

questionable decisions that the Germans made in the course of the war. These reports formed a study of the German way of war and lent valuable insight into the ways that Adolf Hitler manipulated his countrymen to wage a war on the European mainland. This intelligence, gathered in 1945-47, could have helped the Americans understand what allowed the Germans to become active players in two world wars and bar them from involvement in a third.

Conclusion

Hitler wreaked havoc on the European continent for several years, and nearly defeated the British on their home front. The Battle of Berlin was devastating for the civilian population of England, and there was rampant concern over the possibility that the man responsible was still alive when the war was finally over. Hugh Trevor-Roper was chosen to investigate the circumstances surrounding Hitler's death, and completed the investigation with the help of American and Canadian intelligence officials.

The Americans did not provide a large number of valuable interrogations to the British on Hitler's death, but they were responsible for several high-quality reports that Trevor-Roper used in his report and subsequent publication, *The Last Days of Hitler*. The Americans turned their reports over immediately to the British, which in turn allowed the Americans to pursue more pressing concerns. The files in the National Archives at College Park Maryland indicated that the Americans were extremely busy during the period in which Trevor-Roper was conducting his investigation, but they were not focusing on Adolf Hitler. Their work into Hitler's death was primarily reactive. This investigation ended abruptly after the key witnesses were found, and American intelligence considered the issue closed. The Americans responded to reports that Hitler was poisoned by his physician in a similar manner, and worked quickly to find the truth.

The Americans conducted forty-three interrogations in the immediate months after Hitler's death, and the topics ranged from the German press's censorship to questions about the various campaigns that the German army undertook. This information created a logistical and administrative case study into the way the Germany conducted the Second World War. It also provided insight into the various Nazi decisions that the Allied forces considered questionable. Originally, I hypothesized that that these interrogations were part of Operation Paperclip, an American initiative to utilize German scientists and engineers to advance United States

technology. In the end there was no clear link between the two groups of interrogations although there were similarities including the fact that the prisoners were held and questioned in the occupied zones on matters of high priority to the Americans.

The interrogations reveal a great interest among American interrogators in understanding and coping with the destruction that the Second World War caused, as well as the desire to make sure that the Germans never launched another world war again. The interrogations helped to illuminate the way that Hitler mobilized his nation and motivated them even when the odds were against Germany. Looking back on the war helped America understand the Nazi war machine and move forward with an understanding of Germany's shortcomings that led to their ultimate defeat. The Americans were not concerned with Hitler's death both because they trusted the British, and they were possibly already looking toward a reconfigured political map of the world divided between two hostile major powers, given the rising tensions with Stalin's Russia. Deep, contextualized knowledge of how Germany had fought its war gave them an advantage technologically and historically in the reconfigured world of international relations that they faced.

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